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ABSTRACT

The assignment of special roles or specific skills within family units has been of considerable interest to researchers and clinicians. The present study attempted to understand how a variety of social, technical and artistic skills were attributed within families, and how this constellation related to reports of "quality of life" issues. It was expected that a person's style of attributing skills to family members would relate significantly to: (1) how they feel about their present life quality; (2) how they viewed their life quality during childhood; and (3) the degree of marital harmony perceived between parents. One hundred seventy five undergraduate students volunteered as subjects. Each student completed a paper and pencil questionnaire consisting of several questions about quality of life issues and a family skill matrix. Distribution of skills in the family was found to interact strongly with a variety of life quality measures. Pronounced sex differences were found. Among the more striking findings were: males sharing skills with their father and females sharing skills with both father and mother reported greater satisfaction with quality of life; and reports of more self-ascribed skills related to reports of greater life quality. Results are discussed from a communications framework. (Author)

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Quality of Life and Communication of Family Skills: Who Gets the Goodies? [1]

David M. Young, Kim M. Korner, and Ernst G. Beier

University of Utah

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One hundred seventy five undergraduate students volunteered as subjects. Each student completed a paper and pencil questionnaire consisting of several questions about quality of life issues and a family skill matrix.

Distribution of skills in the family was found to interact strongly with a variety of life quality measures (past and present). Pronounced sex differences were found. Among the more striking findings were: males sharing skills with their father and females sharing skills with their father and mother reported greater satisfaction with quality of life; and reports of more self-ascribed skills related to reports of greater life quality. Results are discussed from a communications framework.

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Subjects were 175 students enrolled in undergraduate psychology classes who volunteered upon request by the experimenter. Some subjects arranged to receive experimental (additional) credit for their voluntary participation.

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Each subject completed a paper and pencil questionnaire consisting of: (1) several questions about quality of life issues; and (2) a family skill matrix. The family skill matrix consisted of a list of 20 characteristics (e.g., business sense, ease at making friends, musical ability, etc.) which subjects were asked to assign to themselves and to the members of their family of origin. Skills were balanced for sex-role preference. A copy of the questionnaire is attached at the end of this paper.

Results

In this particular study we were primarily concerned with life quality variables and skill variables.

Life Quality Variables

The life quality measures were five point scales rated in response to questions about (1) Present Happiness; (2) Parental Harmony; (3) Past Happiness; and (4) Family Harmony. Tables 1 and 2 present the relationship between these four scales. All means differed significantly for all male respondents. Means for the females were not different between Parental Harmony and Present Happiness, Past Happiness, and Family Harmony. Table 2 presents the relationship between the life quality variables broken down by sex.

Skill Variables

Each subject completed a skill assignment matrix. For each of twenty

skills (see Table 6), the respondent checked those family members (him/herself included) who possessed that skill. Calculated for each respondent's matrix was: (1) the number of self-assigned skills; (2) the number of skill overlaps with the mother's skill ratings; (3) the number of skill overlaps with the father's skill ratings; and (4) the number of skill overlaps between mother and father.

Presented in Tables 3 and 4 are the relationships between skill assignment measures. Broken down by sex, all skill variable means differed significantly save skills shared with mother and skills shared with father. Females did not differ in number of skills shared with father and number of skills shared by parents. All skill measures are significantly correlated for both males and females.

Relationship of Life Quality Variables and Skill Variables

There is a significant positive relationship between Present Happiness and number of personal skills. For females, skills shared with mother relate significantly with Parental Harmony, Past Happiness, and Family Harmony. For males, only the relationship between Past Happiness and skills shared with mother is significant. For males, skills shared with father relate significantly with Present Happiness, Past Happiness, and Family Harmony. The variables that significantly correlate with female ratings of skills shared with father were: Parental Harmony, Past Happiness, and Family Harmony. Only in the female sample did skills shared by parents correlate with reports of Parental Harmony. The number of skills shared by parents significantly is related to Past Happiness and Family Harmony for both sexes.

It was expected that the type of skill self-assigned would interact with self reports of Present Happiness. Table 6 presents a breakdown of skill type by self reports of Present Happiness. Of eight hypothesized personality skills,

five were significantly related to Present Happiness. Of the remaining twelve skills, only one was significantly related to Present Happiness

Discussion

If we adopt the framework that role assignment within families is an important means of dividing up psychological territory (Beier & Valens, 1975), it was not surprising that the students in our sample who reported satisfaction with their life quality also claimed possession of many skills and attributes. Of the 20 skills listed, the interpersonal or emotionally based items were the most important attributes relating to positive reports of life quality. This finding, in concert with the factor-analytic work of Zautra, Beier, and Cuppel (1976), suggested that some important predictors of life quality are within the area of interpersonal and family life.

The analysis of skill overlaps was an attempt to explore relationships between personal life satisfaction and patterns of skill sharing or "identification" with other family members. If sharing these attributes is viewed as a self-reported form of coalition, the findings that students who shared skills with their parents also reported satisfaction with the quality of their lives seems reasonable. Students not displaying skill overlap with either parent presented themselves as unhappy in their reports about life quality. Perhaps these unhappy students felt "included out" of coalitions with their parents. Further research, employing complete families as respondents, may help clarify this pattern.

The findings of sex differences in the relationship between child-parent overlap of skills and quality of life reports was also of interest. Men who shared skills with their fathers reported more satisfaction with the quality of their lives than men who did not. Women who shared skills with their fathers and/or mothers also reported more satisfaction with life quality than women who

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The results of the present study indicated that significant relationships between reports of life satisfaction and the attribution of skills within a family matrix could be obtained through the use of a fairly simple questionnaire. Recently we administered a modified form of our inventory to each member of approximately 70 (3, 4, and 5 member) families. The data from the new survey should be helpful in exploring additional information on the nature of role-assignments processes within families. Perhaps this methodology will help us understand how the division of psychological territory within families relates to reports of personal happiness and effective family functioning.

Table 1

T-Tests Between Life Quality Variables Broken Down by Sex

	Present Happiness	Parental Harmony	Past Happiness	Family Harmony
Present Happiness	.000 .000			
Parental Harmony	1.944* 2.611**	.000 .000		
Past Happiness	1.869 2.817**	.637 .442***	.000 .000	
Family Harmony	3.178** 5.000***	1.697 2.688**	2.652* 3.477***	.000 .000

female n = 67
male n = 99

* = $p < .05$
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	Present Happiness	Parental Harmony	Past Happiness	Family Harmony
Present Happiness	1.000 1.000			
Parental Harmony	.046 .116	1.000 1.000		
Past Happiness	.245 .310**	.610*** .438***	1.000 1.000	
Family Harmony	-.022 .158	.700 .609***	.691*** .593***	1.000 1.000

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Table 3

T-Tests Between Skill Variables Broken Down by Sex

	Personal Skills	Skills shared with mother	Skills shared with father	Skills shared by parents
Personal Skills	.000 .000			
Skills shared with mother	14.418*** 21.469***	.000 .000		
Skills shared with father	12.302*** 19.949***	1.822 .175	.000 .000	
Skills shared by parents	12.889*** 20.088***	3.763*** 4.188***	2.025 3.764***	.000 .000

female n = 67
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* = p < .05
** = p < .01
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Table 4

Correlations Between Skill Variables Broken Down By Sex

	Personal Skills	Skills shared with mother	Skills shared with father	Skills shared by parents
Personal Skills	1.000 1.000			
Skills shared with mother	.769*** .760***	1.000 1.000		
Skills shared with father	.592*** .647***	.634*** .646***	1.000 1.000	
Skills shared by parents	.524*** .483***	.731*** .764***	.868*** .790**	1.000 1.000

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Table 5

Correlation Coefficients for Quality of Life Measures

and Shared Skills Broken Down by Sex

	Personal Skills	Skills shared with mother / father		Skills shared by parents
Present Happiness	.305* .274**	.199 .117	.209 .268**	.199 .135
Parental Harmony	-.045 -.025	.387** -.071	.291* -.126	.387** .166
Past Happiness	-.068 .172	.441*** .227*	.332** .268**	.441*** .282**
Family Harmony	-.082 .053	.376** .179	.306* .289**	.376** .395***

female n = 67
male n = 99

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Table 6

Chi Square Probabilities for Individual Skills

Broken Down by Present Happiness Reports

Skill	P
Mathematics	.60
Business	.40
Public Speaking	.39
Making Friends*	.01
Sports	.68
Artistic	.34
Musical	.70
Mechanical	.78
Attractiveness	.34
Stick-to-it-iveness	.20
Self-confidence*	.12
Sensing feelings*	.87
Temper control*	.69
Happy outlook*	.00
Grooming	.89
Up on current events	.62
Socially active*	.04
Don't let things get you down*	.03
Ability to live with self*	.00
Avid reader	.01

*Hypothesized personality variables.

References

Beier, E. G., & Valens, E. G. People-Reading. New York: Stein and Day, 1975

Zautra, A., Beier, E. G. & Cappel, L. Dimensions of life quality in a community. American Journal of Community Psychology, 1976, in press.

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Note: Please do not fill out these forms if there were more than 3 children (self included) in the family you grew up in.

Introduction: The questions below are designed to aid in gathering information to help in improving "quality of life." Your participation in this research is requested on a purely voluntary basis. You are free to decline answering any questions; however, we feel that they are not of too personal a nature and would like you to answer all of them if possible. If you do not wish to answer a particular question or questions, please feel free to write in your comments.

Of course, all information will be held strictly confidential. If you would like a copy of the results of this research, please fill out your name and address below. If you do not wish to fill out this section (name and address) and still want a copy of the results, please send us a card in care of the above project. Thank you for your cooperation in helping to understand and hopefully, improve "quality of life."

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Section I. Below are a number of questions about you and the family you grew up in.

Your age: _____ Your sex (circle): M F

Please list older brothers and sisters.

Sex: M F Current age: _____

Sex: M F Current age: _____

Please list younger brothers and sisters.

Sex: M F Current age: _____

Sex: M F Current age: _____

Current age of father: _____ Current age of mother: _____

Note: If parent(s) were divorced, separated or deceased, which parent did you live with?

_____

Section II. Family Members

Reminder: Please do not fill out this questionnaire if there were more than three children in the family you grew up in.

Please indicate on the following checklist (by marking an X in the appropriate box or boxes) which family member or members could be best characterized by each of the following skills or abilities. Though we all have these characteristics to a certain extent, please check those characteristic only if they are very typical of a particular person or persons in your family.

	Self	Father	Mother	Older Bro. 1st 2nd (if any)	Yngr Bro. 1st 2nd (if any)	Older Sis. 1st 2nd (if any)	Yngr Sis. 1st 2nd (if any)
Skill in mathematics							
Business sense							
Public speaking skill							
Ease in making friends							
Natural sports skill							
Artistic ability							
Musical skills							
Mechanical skills							
Attractiveness to opposite sex							
"Stick-to-it-iveness"							
Self-confidence							
Good at sensing feelings of others							
Happy outlook on life							
Well groomed							
Up to date on current events							
Keeps socially active							
Doesn't let things get them down							
Good ability to live with themselves							
Good at controlling temper							

Section III. Family Harmony

A. Please circle the number beside the statement which best represents how harmonious your family was while you were growing up.

1. Very harmonious - a loving family
2. By and large a good family climate
3. Average in getting along
4. Lots of bickering
5. Constant fights

B. Please circle the number beside the statement which best represents how harmonious your parents were with each other while you were growing up.

1. Very harmonious together
2. By and large got along well
3. Average in getting along
4. Lots of bickering
5. Constant fights

_____: does not apply, one parent family while growing up

C. Please circle the number of the statement which best represents how happy you were while growing up.

1. Very happy
2. By and large happy
3. Average in happiness
4. Often unhappy
5. Usually unhappy

D. Please circle the number of the statement which best represents how your parents used physical discipline in raising the children while you were growing up.

1. Discipline was usually physical
2. Discipline was often physical
3. Average use of physical discipline
4. Rarely used physical discipline
5. Never used physical discipline

E. How many physical fights have you been in since the age of 14? _____ (Write in number.)

Section IV. Current Life

A. Please circle the number beside the statement which best represents how happy you are now with the quality of your life.

1. Very happy
2. By and large happy
3. Average in happiness
4. Often unhappy
5. Usually unhappy

B. What is your overall college grade point average (G.P.A.)? (Estimate if necessary): _____

C. What is your current year in school?

____ Freshman ____ Sophomore ____ Junior ____ Senior ____ Grad. Student

D. Are you now employed? _____ Yes _____ No

E. If employed, are you working in an area related to your skills and interests?

_____ Yes _____ No

F. If employed, please circle the number beside the statement which best represents how satisfied you are with your job.

1. Very satisfied
2. By and large satisfied
3. Average satisfaction
4. Often unsatisfied
5. Usually unsatisfied

G. Your current marital status _____

H. Do you have children? _____ Yes _____ No If YES, how many? _____

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Temper control*	.69
Happy outlook*	.00
Grooming	.89
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Note: Please do not fill out these forms if there were more than 3 children (self included) in the family you grew up in.

Introduction: The questions below are designed to aid in gathering information to help in improving "quality of life." Your participation in this research is requested on a purely voluntary basis. You are free to decline answering any questions; however, we feel that they are not of too personal a nature and would like you to answer all of them if possible. If you do not wish to answer a particular question or questions, please feel free to write in your comments.

Of course, all information will be held strictly confidential. If you would like a copy of the results of this research, please fill out your name and address below. If you do not wish to fill out this section (name and address) and still want a copy of the results, please send us a card in care of the above project. Thank you for your cooperation in helping to understand and hopefully, improve "quality of life."

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Section I. Below are a number of questions about you and the family you grew up in.

Your age: _____ Your sex (circle): M F

Please list older brothers and sisters.

Sex: M F Current age: _____

Sex: M F Current age: _____

Please list younger brothers and sisters.

Sex: M F Current age: _____

Sex: M F Current age: _____

Current age of father: _____ Current age of mother: _____

Note: If parent(s) were divorced, separated or deceased, which parent did you live with?

_____

Section II. Family Members

Reminder: Please do not fill out this questionnaire if there were more than three children in the family you grew up in.

Please indicate on the following checklist (by marking an X in the appropriate box or boxes) which family member or members could be best characterized by each of the following skills or abilities. Though we all have these characteristics to a certain extent, please check those characteristic only if they are very typical of a particular person or persons in your family.

	Self	Father	Mother	Older Bro. 1st 2nd (if any)	Yngr Bro. 1st 2nd (if any)	Older Sis. 1st 2nd (if any)	Yngr Sis. 1st 2nd (if any)
Skill in mathematics							
Business sense							
Public speaking skill							
Ease in making friends							
Natural sports skill							
Artistic ability							
Musical skills							
Mechanical skills							
Attractiveness to opposite sex							
"Stick-to-it-iveness"							
Self-confidence							
Good at sensing feelings of others							
Happy outlook on life							
Well groomed							
Up to date on current events							
Keeps socially active							
Doesn't let things get them down							
Good ability to live with themselves							
Good at controlling temper							

Section III. Family Harmony

A. Please circle the number beside the statement which best represents how harmonious your family was while you were growing up.

1. Very harmonious - a loving family
2. By and large a good family climate
3. Average in getting along
4. Lots of bickering
5. Constant fights

B. Please circle the number beside the statement which best represents how harmonious your parents were with each other while you were growing up.

1. Very harmonious together
2. By and large got along well
3. Average in getting along
4. Lots of bickering
5. Constant fights

_____: does not apply, one parent family while growing up

C. Please circle the number of the statement which best represents how happy you were while growing up.

1. Very happy
2. By and large happy
3. Average in happiness
4. Often unhappy
5. Usually unhappy

D. Please circle the number of the statement which best represents how your parents used physical discipline in raising the children while you were growing up.

1. Discipline was usually physical
2. Discipline was often physical
3. Average use of physical discipline
4. Rarely used physical discipline
5. Never used physical discipline

E. How many physical fights have you been in since the age of 14? _____ (Write in number.)

Section IV. Current Life

A. Please circle the number beside the statement which best represents how happy you are now with the quality of your life.

1. Very happy
2. By and large happy
3. Average in happiness
4. Often unhappy
5. Usually unhappy

B. What is your overall college grade point average (G.P.A.)? (Estimate if necessary): _____

C. What is your current year in school?

____ Freshman ____ Sophomore ____ Junior ____ Senior ____ Grad. Student

D. Are you now employed? _____ Yes _____ No

E. If employed, are you working in an area related to your skills and interests?

_____ Yes _____ No

F. If employed, please circle the number beside the statement which best represents how satisfied you are with your job.

1. Very satisfied
2. By and large satisfied
3. Average satisfaction
4. Often unsatisfied
5. Usually unsatisfied

G. Your current marital status _____

H. Do you have children? _____ Yes _____ No If YES, how many? _____